Presiding officials at the General Council meeting held in Whiterocks December 20th were (Left) Ivan Duncan, interpreter; and (Right) Grace Root, Chairman. The general council was called on petition from some 55 members of the tribe for the purpose of discussing some eight agenda items. (Courtesy Ute Bulletin)

Ute Indian General Council Plans Evaporate in Attack On McKinley

By Ute Bulletin Staff

Leaders of the move to assemble a general council of the Ute Indians December 20th saw their plans go completely awry and disorganized as the meeting descended to the level of personal accusations and an attempt by Oran Curry, member of the Affiliated Ute Citizens, to direct the meeting toward removal from office of Francis McKinley, member of the Tribal Business Committee.

The meeting never moved off the first topic of the agenda as proposed by Horace (Wallace) Jack of Whiterocks who had been the spokesman for the group wanting to call the meeting. The agenda items for discussion concerned problems connected with Public Law 671, mostly centering around the termination of the mixed blood group. Harvey Natches, Chairman of the Tribal Council, said that because the agenda was about problems which had already been consummated and apparently closed as part of the termination proceedings involving the mixed blood Utes, the meeting probably was inspired by malcontents from the Affiliated Utes who are now going through the throes of living as private citizens.

Curry, a former chairman of the Ute Tribal Council and one of the prime movers in having the Ute Tribe organize under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, some 23 years ago (1937), bitterly denounced the tribal government, all of the acts and decisions of the Ute Tribe during the past ten years, and in particular, Francis McKinley, who has assisted the Tribe in its developmental programs. He asked that members of the Ute Tribe to remove him from office and recommended that no members of the Tribe should ever be employed to assist the tribe in self-government operations. He said that this should be left up to non-Indians or Indians from other Tribes.

In reply to Curry's bitter accusations, Francis McKinley said that he had been under pressure from Curry to provide a job for his son and because he hadn't succumbed to this demand, he had been threatened with revenge and had been subject to letters to Congressman and every individual who might be connected with Indian service work. In addition McKinley cited acts, laws, and decisions by the Tribe in general councils over a period of ten years which were responsible for the enactment of Public Law 671, which terminated the mixed blood Utes, and which also required the Tribe to develop long range programs. He said that many of the leaders who were claiming that they didn't know how everything got started sat on committees, planning groups, and participated in general councils where important decisions were made for several years. He also said that a number of them went to Washington to see the Commissioner when the development plans were being made.

After McKinley's long summation of the Ute planning history, the assembled group of about 100 adult members gave him a vigorous applause of confidence. Many of the younger members of the Tribe came to the defense of the Council members and pleaded for unity. They cautioned the tribesman against outside influences who were too ready to disorganize the Tribal government and create confusion, distrust, and suspicion in order to gain their own private goals.

Charley Atwine, one of the veteran leaders of the Uintah band, put the dissenting members of the Tribe on the defensive when he asked them to list their grievances and to conduct the meeting so that the problems could be aired. He said, "It isn't up to the members of the Tribal Business Committee to set themselves up as a target for you to shoot at. You got to get up in front and take over the leadership of this meeting so that the rest of the members of this tribe can determine what is troubling you". Atwine called for unity of the Tribe and said that we ought to forget the band differences, stop talking about what has happened and get down to work on the great new problems which are facing us.

The day long meeting broke with the Wallace Jack group uncertain as to what further steps to take. It was suggested by members of the tribal council that a report be given on each agenda item and that these reports be distributed to interested members. After such distribution, it was also suggested that the Indian people meet with their councilman in community meetings, and that if necessary, a general council could be called again if any decisions had to be made. This suggestion was not picked up for discussion as the tired tribal members rushed outside to continue with their pre-Christmas activities.